

misch sticking out of some dune-glen or other, or a tamarisk-cone would loom into sight. I wonder if this vegetation is the last surviving remnant of a steppe which covered the ground before the sandy desert was formed, and since the invasion of the sand has been smothered by it? In this zone of the desert all the tamarisks are dead, and their branches and stems as brittle as glass. But that they were once strong and full of sap is evident from the notable dimensions they often attain. Why then have they died? Is it because the level of the ground-water has dropped, or is it that the surface of the desert has in the course of time risen? Possibly it is both these causes combined that have been operative. The kamisch on the other hand appears to be more tenacious of life; you see it growing fresh and strong close beside the dead tamarisks, though whether its roots are longer than those of the tamarisk, or whether it is satisfied with the transitory moisture that is able to acidify the soil, I do not know.



Fig. 285. FOLLOWING THE CREST OF A SNOW-COVERED DUNE.

During the day the snowy coverlet, in consequence of the sun's power, underwent certain changes as it thawed and froze again. The farther we travelled towards the south, the deeper lay the snow; in other words, the snow-fall was heavier in the regions that lay nearer to the mountains, and was less towards the north. Perhaps it had altogether failed to reach the middle of the desert. On the convex summits of the dunes looking towards the north, the snow lay decimeter thick; and